

Shanghai Community

CITY
WEEKEND

www.cityweekend.com.cn/shclassifieds • Classifieds hotline 6362-0022 ext. 8806

Easy Life

Best Moving
Companies • C8

The LGBeat

Gay Spotting • C18

Sex & Relationships

Cinematic
Quandary • C19



The New Danwei

Why we're getting major office envy • C2

Hot Properties • Events • Chinese Corner • Classifieds



A look inside the
YanPing Attic

The New Danwei

How Shanghai's start-up cafés and indie events are changing **the way we work**

▶ Beijing has China's Silicon Valley in Zhongguancun but Shanghai's start-up scene is catching up. Previously spread across the city's sprawl, start-up cafes like Xindanwei and People Squared as well as tech event organizations like Techyizu are uniting a fragmented community.

Sitting in Xindanwei's first floor café on hip Yongjia Lu, co-founder Chen Xu chuckles over the neighborhood gossip. "People walk by our big window and wonder what's going on here. We've been asked if we are a library, a school or an internet café without computers," she says.

Xindanwei, literally meaning "new work unit," is the first creative work space in Shanghai. Its first floor café is open to the public, and it has an upstairs co-working area where small

companies and freelance artists rub elbows renting desks and meeting rooms. "We wanted to connect people in creativity and innovation. We thought that apart from gathering creatives, there was a business model behind co-working that could sustain it," Xu explains.

The cozy digs are a far cry from Xindanwei's 2009 beginning when they were on the top floor of a building that the elevator didn't reach. "We had to convince people that they didn't want to spend all day working in pajamas but that they wanted to come out and meet people under one roof to discuss collaboration opportunities."

Nowadays, Xindanwei has been joined by a number of new start-up cafés including People Squared, which has one spot on Huashan Lu and has just opened a

second location on Changping Lu, called YanPing Attic. "In Silicon Valley, there's a garage culture but in Shanghai, we don't have garages," founder Bob Zheng says. "It's hard for start-up teams to gather. They really need a space designed for them. Start-ups should be fun, not just people working in a small room."

In addition to teams sharing workspace, the community holds weekly meetings where members can interact. "People start knowing the real person and not just the person sitting there working," he explains. "We try to encourage teams to share what they're up to, and through these channels you see different teams and individuals collaborating."

The co-working model is already quite established in Europe. Through a Dutch govern-

ment program, the Dutch Design Work Space opened its Shanghai branch in 2010 on Shaanxi Bei Lu. While the space is designed for larger operations, director Giel Groothuis still sees the value of co-working. "It's important in that first stage of starting that you share information and learn from each other," he says. "Many of the people here have become each other's clients."

These spaces also open their doors through events like tech competitions, art exhibitions and workshops. In February, Finnish global incubation program Start-up Sauna came to Shanghai for the first time and drew more than 100 people, including Angry Birds CEO Mikael Hed. The number of similar events is increasing.

"Many of the people here have become each other's clients"

Last year, volunteer community organization Techyizu formed with the mandate of growing the tech community through publicized events. Their popular Bar



Co-founder Chen Xu
kicks back in a cozy corner
of Xindarwei

Camp "unconference," a platform for anyone passionate about technology to share their ideas with like-minded peers, has been where groups like Shanghai's first hackerspace, XinCheJian, formed.

"Even if we can't describe Shanghai's tech scene as thriving, it's still ten times larger than San Francisco and Seattle combined because of the sheer number of people participating," Techyizu co-founder Mark Evans says. "A lot of what we do is to get the existing community talking to one another. At these events, we meet a bunch of people doing really cool stuff who we have never heard of and they live down the block from us."

The growth in the community mirrors a changing economic landscape. Technology has made doing a start-up easier, and the mobile internet boom has inspired more locals to ditch the worn traditional route of office work and instead strike out on their own.

It's a movement that Trilogy VC founder Stephen Bell foresaw. Started in 2009, his venture capital group organizes start-up

salons at Chinese schools like Shanghai's Jiaotong University, where student teams have a minute to pitch their idea in the hopes of getting funded. "Over the last twenty years China has undergone an economic miracle boosted by manufacturing," Bell says. "The next wave will be led by students and young entrepreneurs. If you look at the most recent successful companies, they were started by students."

While interests in starting up a company still remain limited among locals, attitudes are changing noticeably. On top of growing investor interest, large companies are employing co-working elements in their offices. The government has also highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship in their latest five-year plan.

Evans of Techyizu, who witnessed the growth of Portland, Oregon's tech community, knows what's next. "Once you get the young, the hungry, the entrepreneurial, then the investors, the VCs and the headhunters all swirl around," he predicts. "It becomes a fun party."

■ **Andrew Chin**